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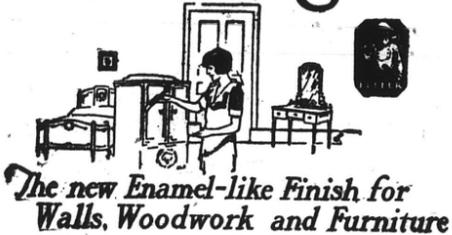
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The LEADING LADY

GERALDINE BONNER

PROLOGUE.—While dependent over the enforced hiding of her fiancé, Jim Dallas, slayer in self-defense of Homer Parkinson, member of an influential family, Sybil Saunders, popular actress, is engaged to play "Twelfth Night" on Gull Island, on the Maine coast. In the company are Sybil's bosom friend, Anne Tracy; Anne's brother Joe, young wastrel; and Aleck Stokes, an actor infatuated with Sybil.

CHAPTER I.—After the play, which is a big hit, Wally Shine, official photographer, learns something of the jealousy, professional and otherwise, existing in the company.

CHAPTER II.—Hugh Bassett, director of the play, and Anne Tracy's fiancé, tells Joe he has heard he is spying on Sybil in an effort to learn the whereabouts of Jim Dallas and earn the reward offered by the Parkinson family. The boy's denial is not convincing.

CHAPTER III.—Joe Tracy is arranging for a vacation trip. To Anne he betrays his enmity toward Sybil. Stokes tells Sybil he has news of Jim Dallas, and to secure the necessary privacy they arrange to meet in a small summer house near the main building.

CHAPTER IV.—The sound of a pistol shot startles the assembled company. Investigation shows a revolver has been taken from a desk in the library. Flora, Stokes' wife, bursts in with the announcement that Sybil has been shot and her body carried off by the swift tide that races by the island.

CHAPTER V.—Flora Stokes tells Bassett she saw Sybil shot but did not see the murderer. Bassett notifies the sheriff, Abel Williams. He arrives with Rawson, district attorney, and a man called Patrick. All the company is accounted for, with the exception of Joe Tracy, presumably on his trip. Flora gives her evidence, and the authorities arrange so that no one can leave the island.

CHAPTER VI.—Discussing the tragedy with Rawson and Bassett, Williams voices the opinion that Flora Stokes is the guilty person, the deed being actuated by jealousy. While they are talking, the sound of a crash in the living room makes them hasten there.

CHAPTER VII.—Anne Tracy, shocked at her friend's awful death, is also uneasy about Joe. Remembering his race against Sybil, and realizing she is not sure he left the island, her imagination pictures him as Sybil's murderer, and hiding in the house, the upper story of which is unoccupied. Seeking to inform him of the close watch kept, she descends to the living room. There she dimly sees Joe and warns him not to try to escape. He disappears, and in her agitation she knocks over a lamp. She tells the three men she came downstairs for a book, and her explanation is accepted.

CHAPTER VIII.—In the summer house the investigators find evidence that Sybil has been there, and knowing of Stokes' infatuation, Rawson and Williams at once suspect him of the murder.

CHAPTER IX
 BASSETT was detailed to find Stokes and bring him to the library. A summons from the

director would have an air of informality which might put Stokes off his guard.

Bassett found Flora and Shine on the balcony and heard that Stokes had gone to his room to try to get some sleep. He knocked on the door, and to a gruff "Come in" entered, to find Stokes lying on the bed. He rose quickly, exhibiting the same alacrity his wife had shown earlier in the day. "Of course," he said, "I'm ready to come whenever they want me. In fact, I've been trying here expecting it, going back over last evening, trying to think of anything I may have overlooked that might help them."

There was a willing brusqueness in his manner, an almost hearty readiness to do what was asked of him that seemed not quite genuine, adopted, perhaps, to hide the natural nervousness of a person in his position. Seated in an easy chair before the two men, Bassett, back of them by the window, noticed that his hands were restless, smoothing and pulling at his clothes, settling his tie. Despite his disquiet he assumed an attitude of expectant attention, gravely awaiting their will, his eyes glancing from one to the other. He might readily have been a guilty man primed for attack, or an innocent one shaken by the untoward circumstances in which he found himself.

Rawson's manner was friendly and reassuring. They wanted to get all possible information on the movements of the company the evening before. They would like to know just what he had done from the time he entered the house to change his clothes to the time when he had heard the shot.

He answered promptly with businesslike directness. Went to his room, changed his clothes, laid on the bed, rested for a while, then sat on the balcony reading the paper.

While he was sitting there Miss Saunders must have passed the end of the balcony by the path that led to the Point.

She must have, but he had not seen her, being completely occupied with his paper.

Had he while in the house seen Miss Saunders or heard her voice? He had not. He had no idea she had come in.
 Had he seen his wife?
 "My wife? Yes, I saw her for a moment. In the hall when I came out of our rooms after dressing."
 "She said nothing to you about Miss Saunders being in the house?"
 "Why, no, she didn't know it. We (Continued on Next Page)

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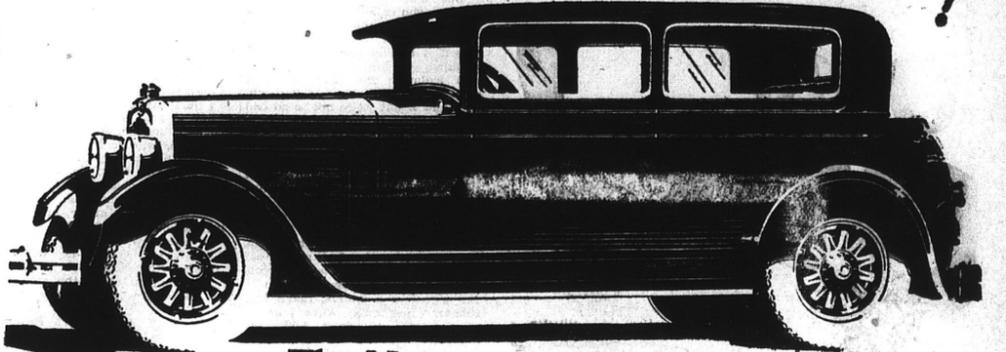
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